

## LUKEWARM CHRISTIANS

(Continued from Page 1.)

entirely at their own expense. And so far as we are able to judge from the self-satisfaction expressed by the church of this city, everything there was in a flourishing condition. The congregation was maintaining its own, probably it was fashionable to go to church or it gave good business standing; the pastor preached acceptable sermons; there is no hint of heresy or faction; the missionary collection was probably as usual; the Ladies' Aid Society or by whatever name it was then known was probably bustling with respectability and enthusiasm. Perhaps there was even an acceptable increase in church membership—"We are rich—in need of nothing." Financially sound—materially prosperous.

But says the true witness vs. this church—"Ye are spiritually poor. I know thy words, thou art neither cold nor hot—thou art lukewarm." And if you and I this morning were to analyze the conditions of this church as to the reason for this judgment, we would probably find the answer in the worldliness and materialism of its members. And we would learn the great lesson that "Love of God," the pursuit after the material things of life is as great a foe to spirituality as is sensuousness. "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." We should probably find that in this church respectability, i. e., the man with the "gold ring and the goodly apparel" was more in evidence than humble piety and religious fervor; we should find that talent, the ability to drive a sharp bargain, was more craved than spiritual power; that wealth and social status were things men marked and desired and recognized to the neglect of the "growth in grace and knowledge of God"; we should find that the cross was not the object of diligent search among any large majority of the people. That is the kind of a church that is spiritually wretched, miserable and poor and blind and naked.

And a question that comes home forcibly to us at this time is, "Was the church at Laodicea always such a church?"—and we can thankfully say no. Its foundation is due probably to St. Paul's missionary zeal, when with Ephesus as headquarters, he continued teaching for the space of two years in the school of Tyrannus, "so that all they which dwell in Asia heard the word of the Lord—both Jew and Greek." In Col. II, we have this church coupled with coldness and a warm commendation for "steadfastness and faith." Lukewarmness was not a condition in which Paul's churches were apt to be found—they were either hot or cold. And moreover, it is all but certain that the Epistle of St. Paul, which we know as "To the Ephesians" was intended as well for the Laodiceans and the high praise we find in that letter reflects the spiritual grace and power of this church which St. John now tells us is so sadly deluded and fallen.

What then is to be the remedy—what is the counsel given to this deluded church? It is this: "Seek riches." Buy me gold, tried in the fire that thou mayest be rich. "To buy" was certainly familiar enough language for these merchants and tradesmen of Laodicea. But being as the witness tells us "wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked," how and with what were they to buy? "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart thou wilt not despise," O God. "That is the courage in God's realm of love, and it is all one needs to give heed to this counsel. It is the old invitation of Isaiah, "He everyone that thirsteth—come ye to the waters and he that hath no money, come ye buy and eat, ye come buy wine and milk without money and without price." Buy gold, tried in the fire which is symbol of faith. The first counsel then is seek true riches—Buy faith with a humble and contrite heart.

Then buy white raiment for thy nakedness. Strange advice this surely to a community of wool-growers—for Laodicea was noted for its black wool and vestments. Buy white says the witness. It is the material vs. the spiritual—An entire change is needed, from black to white, from darkness of self to lightness of spirit, from truth and holiness. Put on the white garments of purity and peace, the true spiritual virtues, the things thou lackest and then buy—eye salve. Here again we have a familiar figure. Anyone who has been in the Orient and visited the hospitals will be impressed by the crowds of people who suffer because of defective vision. The heat and glare of the sun combined with their lack of cleanliness conspires to irritate the eyes and have literally blinded hundreds of people waiting in line at the eye hospitals for the doors to open that they might receive treatment. From the physical then to the spiritual is the advice—buy eye salve. Get the eye of the spiritual vision in right working order, that thou mayest see the wide gulf between thy preaching and thy practice, between thy boasted need of nothing and actual conditions. And strange things would befall us today if we should ever get in the habit of insisting, as one modern writer puts it, "that our practice square with our preaching;—that men must live their doctrines rather than teach them; that men must live their beliefs rather than confess them; that men must live their faith rather than profess them." Kingsley in Hypatia" put it something like this: "If all the Christians in the world lived for one day up to the spirit of the truths they profess the world would be won to Christ by nightfall."

"Because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." And in the judgment here pronounced we find there is a principle involved that may be detached from the special details of Laodicea and applied to modern conditions because the principle holds true whatever those details may be—and that principle is in

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and at prices at a fraction of real value. We have placed orders for the largest stock of merchandise for September delivery ever given by any one store in Phoenix, and we must have room. In order to effect a quick clearance of Summer Goods, we are making price quotations so low that our room-making object will be quickly realized. Make it a point to study and compare at other stores the merchandise mentioned, and you will quickly decide that now and here is the place to save money, and not in nickels and dimes, but actually dollars. There are bargains here that show that one store in Phoenix sells merchandise as low, if not lower, than in any other city in the West. Reduced prices prevail in every department, and, of course, early buyers get the best choosing. Every article or yard of goods is backed by the Boston Store guarantee, which means money back, if not satisfied.

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the expression—"I would thou wert cold or hot!"

How many churches and church-going people have seen their own portrait in this sad letter to Laodicea. They can't be said to be entirely cold, i. e., utterly disregarding of religion or of Christian faith and customs, but they are as certainly not hot, not filled with enthusiasm and determined to shoulder their religious responsibilities and the common run of men like to have it thus. Cold makes them shiver, heat scorches them—they like neither, let's have it moderately warm—a half-way house, for what we may call the "religiously stand-patter." There they congratulate themselves upon being moderate and sober-minded, "wise as serpents and harmless as doves," well spoken of, they speak well of themselves like true Laodiceans, and other people credit what they say. These self-complacent, well satisfied snuggs who "run about in sheep clothing of black wool but inwardly are raving wolves," who wonder at anything approaching religious enthusiasm or a revival. They do not see the world's sheen, the mocking look when their names are mentioned. Still less do they here the sighing of those looking for the consolation of Israel, "the regeneration of the world in this day and generation!"

"Because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." How are we to interpret this message in terms of modern need and thought? Is it possible that there is any ground for a charge of lukewarmness vs. this particular people of Phoenix vs. this particular church, vs. the individuals who constitute its body? That is the burden of my message to you this morning.

Last Sunday evening from the city hall steps I tried to show in a few short sentences how the Christian zeal of the community had not kept pace with the secular zeal. That Phoenix was in the valley—at low levels when it came to accepting increased spiritual responsibility laid upon her by virtue of her increased population and material prosperity. I don't need to go into details. The statement I made then I have not heard contradicted. I repeat it. "Thousands and thousands of dollars have been expended and are being expended today in secular improve-

ments, in buildings both public and private, in the paving of streets and the building of highways and hardly a dollar is being spent to care for the increased spiritual need of the community. Not a red cent is being spent by any of the leading denominations for the erection of new churches in Phoenix; a few paltry churches are being expended in patching up some old ones. And, alas, in all seriousness these things ought to be," and I spoke them to our shame. It savors and snacks of lukewarmness.

A day or so after my return this summer, I walked down the main street of this city for at least three blocks during the busy part of the afternoon looking into every face to see if I could recognize anyone. Only one face of the many I passed did I know. The buildings, too, were changed, new ones in place of the old, in fact it was another town almost, the streets were being torn up, suburban cars were running. There was a spirit of progress abroad. I went on my rounds and visited the churches. I recognized every one of them—even this church, in spite of the addition to the south side, which in Biblical terms more nearly approaches a "new patch on an old garment." Twelve or thirteen years ago when there were as many Indians and Mexicans on the streets of Phoenix as white people and perhaps more, this church was a landmark of spiritual progress. Today one cannot say as much. One wishes one could.

Ah! You say we are going to build a new church—two or three—when the time is ripe. With all due respect to that frankness and sincerity, I have heard that lukewarm answer given for the past eight or ten years and the building is yet to materialize as our symbol of spiritual progress and our doing our part to meet our increased spiritual responsibility. It does not seem to me, but I am not saying that it is not—please do not misunderstand me, but I am bold enough to say or rather suggest, that it might of have been the best thing that could have been done, for it only leads us to be content with less than the best, to be at peace about little worths. One thing we must not lose sight of in religious life is this: "The good is oftentimes

the enemy of the best."

Now, if I have spoken with an undue frankness, it is because I feel deeply on the question. There is no one who owes more to this church than do I. It was before this altar that I took God into my life. It was in the adjoining room that I led my first C. E. meeting. It was in this church that I heard a sermon from which I found no escape until I had, after months of struggle, decided to enter the ministry. Here I taught my first Sunday school class. From this pulpit I preached my first sermon. In this church I looked for the last time upon the dead face of my mother. Men and women, the dearest associations of my life are in connection with this church and they all call out to keep this church as it is—not to change it a hair's breadth.

But in spite of these accumulations and natural desires, because I honestly and sincerely think that we have outgrown our quarters here, and more than that every earnest member in his heart feels this way and that remaining here means and limiting and constricting our greatest sphere of usefulness and influence. Because of this I have dared to say frankly and sincerely what I have said this morning and to suggest that there is a touch of lukewarmness in the air, when it comes to building and investing capital for God. Laodicea, send in fine church reports of a sustaining and a wealthy and an increasing congregation, we may flatter ourselves that the work of the Lord is in a progressive way. We may point with pride to our missionary on the foreign field—and yet, as a church, be guilty of lukewarmness that is immediately necessary because we are neglecting to take the share to making it a city of God!

It is not my intention this morning to analyze the conditions of this community, either in general or in particular, that have led to such a state. For such an analysis I would refer you to that seldom read book in the Bible—The Book of the Prophet Haggai. He writes he tells us in the second year of the Diaries of the

King—that is 16 years after the first return of the children of Israel from Babylon—a return that had been made with the avowed intention of rebuilding the temple. Sixteen years had passed and nothing had been done. "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts," writes Haggai, "This people say, the time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built; and then came the word of the Lord by Haggai, the prophet saying: 'Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cedar houses and this house to be waste?' In other words, the people were busying themselves about their own affairs, speculating, building private dwellings, engaging in public enterprises and improvements and the Lord's house lay waste. It will rest with you to make the application. For me it is this. There must not be a halt in spiritual progress—men and women who belong to the congregation of the Lord must not say, 'This is not the time to build the Lord's house,' when dwell in their hearts their acknowledgment the need.

"Because thou art lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." But listen—"To him that overcometh I will grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father in His throne."

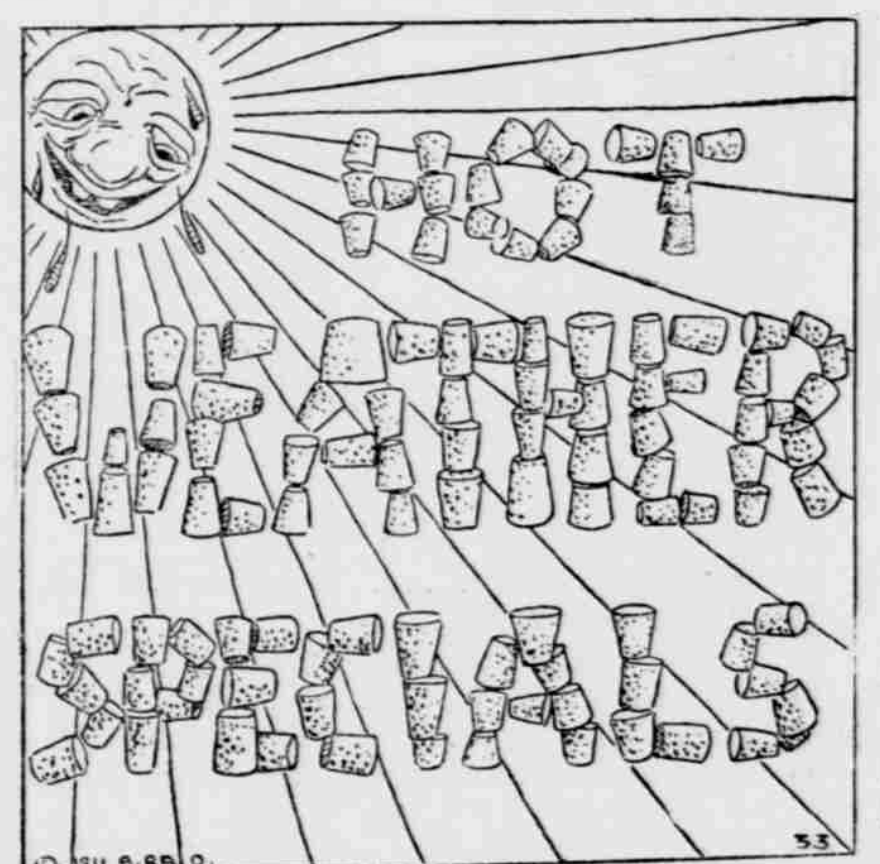
The terrible necessity which brought forth the well merited rebuke of our text also drew forth the loftiest promise. "The least worthy," says MacLaren, "may rise to the highest position. It was not to the victors over persecutions at Sinona, or over heretics at Thyatira nor even to the blameless church of Philadelphia, that this great promise, the climax of the seven, is given, but to Laodicea." "To whom much is given," when much shall be required." We are rich and increased in Goods but we are in need lest we be found unfaithful lukewarm stewards. There is a great work opening up here in Phoenix. Let's be hot on the trail. "The Son of God goes forth to wear a kingly crown to gain. His blood red banner streams afar—who follows in His trail?" Amen.

A manager at the Lamb's Club in New York was condemning an over-literary play. "It failed," he concluded; "the receipts wouldn't pay the expenses. It

is never possible, you know, to take the greater from the less."

But Eddie Foy chuckled and said:

"Hold on, there! I once took the conceit out of a sophomore at the seashore."



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